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ELONGATIONS

What lies closest to your hand
begins. Distance is the first lie,

forgetting is the other. We are subsumed
in the orderly, cases
of one noun. They call it desinence.

Variation becomes us, jealousy
is green because so fertile,
full of hope.

I told you
distance wouldn't matter, the mind
goes on praying when the lips
have other lips to mumble.

Molecules mingle as much as they can
— no more. The rule
is built into our matter.
You fall into me, dissolve
into the thing I also am becoming.
Two makes none. None begins
and comes again. The blue rule.

That said, consider sorrow.
Consider a faint star now on the horizon,
now set. What is the difference?
I am. The tree you marked it by
is there next year. You are.
Is that an answer or evasion.

Consider sun sheen on distant highways
yes, things can be elsewhere, can be far.
Only people can't recede, caught
as we are at the exact crossing point,
each intersection between us, of us,
is the target of a simple god,
we whimper while he plays

but his wit wends us through the world
old fashioned haters on the brink of love
always and never together.

Consider god a brutal consolation
something the salt desert taught us
love without a medium, nothing but law,
that casual remark of the rocks.

8 September 2003

ASKED TO TALK ABOUT THE EARTH

Elegy elected, he mourns
a cackhanded government,
he doubts the American angel.

Somewhere when this
was Amsterdam
something went into hiding

in the shale, caverns, hemlock,
something still here.
It ruled the so-called Indians,

it urges us. Listen.
From the social character
of a place discern the deities,

local landlords of just
beneath the ground,
owners of trees.

Valleys are dangerous,
streams carry so much away
and leave a little gold behind.

Find the gold
and make offerings,
naked among perilous ivies.

8 September 2003

GIVING

Always trying to give something to you
I try one thing then another, a drum
with a blood stain on its skin,
an amber bead to wear in the hollow
of your throat, a bracelet of young garnets,

maybe just a maple leaf, how about that,
a playful slap, a message on the phone
mostly murmuring obvious endearments
because you know the rest. Nothing
doesn't belong to you in the first place.

My job is running through the world
saying the names of things that are yours
on the unlikely chance that you forgot them.

8 September 2003

AFTER READING NAMMALVAR

Tamil bhakti tells me true
a love song's *you* finds its lover

alas the sincerest arrow is
the one that finds the target's heart.

8.IX.03

If I had something to say to you
it would be your body

but you have that already, haven't you?
Just in case, here is your hand.

8.IX.03

Finches gold at nyjer seed
symmetrically disposed they are
on the thistle seed tubular feeder
sunlight milky in the lucite shaft.

8.IX.03

LESS NEED TO ANSWER BUT

“beingness, the truth
of you” the New
Age lady says,
channeling P’taah. I guess that’s Ptah
old artificer, anyhow
she listens hard to hear such stuff

and haven’t others olders written *you* and *truth*
and *of* and other dubious relations?

even the shortest words no proof against error
how can a word be cleaner than my mouth?

Answer: *your* ears, hearing.

9 September 2003

MESA

Table land. Travel
too much the same
roads. How should
a road look? New.

Every mile a different
mirage. There
at the end of wanting
another shimmer

past alfalfa, past
salt past sand,
the mountain where
the prophetesses dance.

9 September 2003

CROSSING

It's thirty years since I drove straight across America. It still seems to be happening. For all the rain of sudden green Ohio, that journey is still going on. A highway never actually ends. After the twentieth motel, every place you sleep ever after is a rented bed, every breakfast a farewell vista. Curious pretty town. I know I'll never see this time and place again.

You don't have to make the changes, you know, change is with you all the time. The car is just your little memory. The road runs by itself.

9 September 2003

CONTROL

When you say bicycle five times fast
does it start rhyming with Michael
and end up with sickle? I am the Goddess
with Pale Hands, reddened
from your meat. In Norway
they paint their wooden houses
with the blood of slaughtered cattle.
Dark red. White is too costly, white is rare.
I look at the autumn sunlight
desperate to control. Belong to me,
distances! A parade of old cars
comes chanting up the highway
from the fairgrounds to meet me.
Ask, ask, meek bicycle, no wonder.
Each spoke points away from the truth.

9 September 2003

OPERA

The only opera my father ever told me about seeing
was Massenet's *The Juggler of Our Lady*.

Isn't it strange that I've never even heard it?

Something is waiting for me there, a miracle, a powerful mistake.

9 September 2003

MALEVICH

Can I paint with milk the memory
of before there was anything to remember?

9.IX.03

FULL MOON

but what about you
are you a farmer?
I've seen you plow
the waves and rake
your fingers down
the smooth of your
own thigh in the sign
called Ripeness
I've seen you take
seed from the wind
to bury shallow
I've seen you let
sun spores come.
What do I know
of all this country stuff
planting or reaping?
I've seen your eyes
study me languid
over the stockade
of dreams. It should be
you who tells me
what the weather means
or what god is dreaming
up behind the clouds.

10 September 2003

Die unbekannte Wissenschaft

There are some with whom no relax
avails, all words come out crooked
from my lips, as if their presence
in the wet chamber of my mouth
make me disclose too much,
make me act out some desperate need
for an attachment I don't want,
spun by the situation itself. The changing
place. Bad chemistry they say
and say no more about it, yet this
is the founding science of the world
the one we are too shy to study, scared
to know the machinery of how we love,
hate, yawn, get on with one another.
What could be more urgent than that,
a secret science still. Not how to get
what we want (alchemy, magic, war)
but why we want it. We have no name
yet for desire's own desire.

10 September 2003

SPEM IN ALIUM

Having a chance to get what we came for

I will not put

my hope there

my heart in another.

The heart belongs only to the heart committed.

The vine does not support the tree.

Libera me!

THE SAMENESS

Why a man
wakes out of dream
his arms aching

generous in leaves
from a city street
under plane trees

ginkgo trees
sumac under fences
lepering the sidewalk

under ailanthus
crushed seeds mush
the country

pervades the city
no place without
mold, rat, bat

hawk. We only think
a difference
it all is material,

silva, hyle,
it's all the style
of things, matter

is a forest
to begin with
alas alas

we are the elves
of it, we are
what's left of magic.

11 September 2003

MIDNIGHT

Be sure. A sail
on the corner of the sea

dark sail is it wet
or is it color

how can you tell
but what you see?

Throw yourself down
from the headland

drown in it,
the ship is coming

to kill you
all the stories

converge in you
and take your own away.

11 September 2003